1: Grigson G-5 (1927-1934) 1949
AW32 Gond AW32
Hill Maria
Bison Horn Maria

colour sense in bead-work, it is noticeable that the best carpet weavers in Jagdalpur Jail are almost invariably Bison-horn Marias. They are quick to grasp intricacies of pattern, and there is hardly any pattern that they cannot copy. For years the chief instructor in the jail was the double murderer from Palnar already mentioned in this chapter.

The Marias of both kinds are very hospitable. On entering a Hill Maria village you are met by the elders and offered little gifts, an uncouth yam, or dried tobacco leaves and forest fruits. The whole village co-operates to get your camp ready, and to entertain you at night with song and dance. The occasional stranger from other Koitor villages or minor State official is housed and fed, provided he does not outstay his welcome or attempt to be exacting in his demands. Co-operation, in service to the State, in village festivals, in felling of forest for *penda* cultivation, in allotment of *penda* areas, in sowing, reaping, winnowing and storing of grain, in fishing and hunting, is the key to the social life of the Hill Maria, who is a natural communist; his hospitality is perhaps mainly an expression of his ingrained co-operation, though he is genuinely glad to see you after a long absence, and will greet you with tears of joy. The Bison-horn Maria is more of an individualist, or, rather, less of a communist, than the hill man, but he likes to entertain for a wedding or to celebrate the completion of a new *munda* (small rice irrigation tank) and similar occasions on a lavish scale, keeping open house. All Marias are extremely grateful for any benefit received and for sympathy and interest.

[p. 98 is blank]

1: Grigson G-5 (1927-1934) 1949
AW32 Gond AW32
Hill Maria
Bison Horn Maria

Chapter VII

Agriculture

The whole life of the Maria is primarily directed towards the raising of food from the earth, either by cultivation, or by gathering the fruits of the forest, or by fishing, hunting or trapping. His agriculture, as we have seen, determines the sites of his villages, and regulates his relations with his wife. His festivals, it will be seen, are designed either to ensure the benevolence of the earth and the ancestors and the clan-god towards the crops about to be sown, or to celebrate the first eating of each of the main crops, and the final harvest-home, in a spirit of communal thanksgiving. The human population to him is the crop of men that the *Bhum* or Earth raises for the clan, or for the Ruling Chief.

The Hill Maria still regards the crops as the result of the combined labours of the village rather than of the labours of individuals. If one suffers, all suffer, and all combine to support the old and the needy, and to help each fellow villager to get through the heaviest parts of the yearly agricultural round. The young man on marriage, or the fellow clansman settling in the village, must have his share of the village lands for cultivation. In the raising of crops, then, the village and not the individual cultivator is the unit, even now, in the Abujhmar hills. But the Bison-horn Maria is an individualist. He has lived long in contact with semi-Hinduized neighbours, and has long begun to practise the more advanced methods of the settled cultivator. Permanent cultivation fosters individualism. Even in the Abujhmar hills the few permanent rice fields are definitely the private property of individuals; and as the use of the plough spreads and more and more of the wet lands become permanent rice fields, the owners of these fields begin more and more to assert in their shifting cultivation plots the rights of permanent private ownership already admitted in their rice fields. This has already happened among the Bison-horn Marias, aided by the rapid growth of population increasing the pressure on the land and reducing the land available for distribution to newcomers to the villages. The indications are that formerly they shared the communal attitude of the Hill Maria. In describing, therefore, the agricultural life of the community, I shall deal primarily with that of the Hill Marias, indicating where necessary the different developments among the Bison-horn Marias.

1: Grigson G-5 (1927-1934) 1949
AW32 Gond AW32
Hill Maria
Bison Horn Maria

the midst of the grain crops to support them. The cut crops which are to be threshed are stacked on the wooden platforms prepared before sowing, in beehive shaped stacks, called *pakí* by the Hill Marias and *kupa* in Halbi.

The women prepare the threshing-floor (*karanu* in the hill dialect), clearing a piece of ground near the stacks of grain, and plastering it with mud. In the centre of this the men erect a thick bamboo railing on posts. It is *polo* for women to take part in the actual threshing. Oxen are never used. For each cultivator in turn, beginning with the *kasyeq-gaita*, all the men and boys in the village combine to thresh (*wisna*). They range themselves in two rows facing each other, with the bamboo railing between them.[1] Holding this with both their hands and supporting themselves by it, they dance up and down, rubbing the ears of corn between their feet. They thresh in this way only *kodon*, *kutki*, rice, *ghatka*, *chikma* and *hikka*; the women pick the ears of grains like *kang* and *bajra* in baskets, and rub them in their hands to extract the grain. The cultivator whose grain is being threshed is expected to feed all the villagers helping him for that day, and if possible to give them a good drink of *salphi*, the fermented sap of the sago palm (*Caryota urens*; Maria, *garga marra*), which is raised from cuttings in large numbers all over the Hill Maria country. The threshed grain is winnowed by men only, winnowing being as taboo to women as sleeping in the fields or threshing. One man stands on a rough wooden platform and pours the grain from a basket held above his head, while another, if there is not wind enough, winnows the falling grain with a basketry winnowing fan of the usual Indian type (*het* in Maria). All the men and women of the village combine to carry the threshed and winnowed grain of each cultivator to his compartment in the long granary. They never measure their produce, but there is no taboo on this account; it simply is that they grow crops for their own sustenance, and not for sale, and it is easy to see whether the grain garnered is adequate for the coming year or not. They do indeed understand something of bazaar measures, for some of their pulses and oil seeds are sold annually to raise the money needed to pay their poll-tax; they make their own measures of basketry, with different traditional shapes for each kind of produce that they sell; and at the bazaar you may see them measuring out their produce in these in front of the Hindu tradesmen to whom they are selling it. Their measures are very accurate, and need never be challenged. If they make them a little too large, they plaster a little mud over the bottom to reduce the capacity.

[1] I have since seen *kodon* and *kutki* threshed in the same way by Korkus on the Betul border of Hoshangabad District, Central Provinces.

1: Grigson G-5 (1927-1934) 1949
AW32 Gond AW32
Hill Maria
Bison Horn Maria

same ceremonies and festivals are observed in connexion with cutting and firing of the *penda*, sowing, harvesting and first eating of the new crops. Most of the reaping of the 'big *kosra*' crops had been completed, but that of the '*os kosra*' millets and pulses was still in progress. For many of the *penda* plots in the current *kaghai* cultivation clearing (see p. 107) this was the second and last year of cultivation, and the *kuthi* crop raised was known as *hiwar*, a term, according to the *Gazetteer*,[1] always technically applied to these second year crops. I sent specimens of both *hiwar* and *kosra* or *kohala* (see p. 134) for identification to the Nagpur Agricultural College: botanically both were identical. These villages have never had the advantage of the special system of poll-tax assessment on every able-bodied axeman in the village which I devised for Bastar (p. 145). The system followed in these hill villages of Ahiri is roughly this. Each *penda* is cut by a number of villagers with the approval of the *gaita*, and the portion cut by each of them is roughly marked by one or other of the methods indicated on page 131. Help is taken from other villagers, who are always ready to give this mutual aid, and at harvest the produce is divided among the different shareholders of the *penda*, with something also for all who helped to clear the *penda*; sometimes a number of plots are specially earmarked for division of the produce by the *gaita* and elders amongst all who joined in clearing the whole *kaghai* and in watching and fencing the crops; a part of the produce is also allocated to villagers too old and feeble to work. The zamindar's *kamdar* or agent is paid rent, usually in kind, by the *gaita* for the whole village, for paying which the *gaita* takes a share of the produce of each *penda* plot. The village cultivation is in fact a truly co-operative enterprise.

I have alluded above to the arbitrary stopping in the plains Maria villages of the Chanda zamindaris of *dahi* cultivation, and the consequent increase of debt among the Marias. This Kuvakodi hill tract is fortunate, however, in having escaped this prohibition; it is the only Ahiri area where *penda* reigns undisturbed. It was therefore no surprise to find not a single case of old debt among the fifty or sixty Hill Maria cultivators who assembled at my camp from Kuvakodi and the other hill villages. Occasionally when crops are poor and the *kamdar* has to be paid rent in cash, the *gaita* goes to a Teli money-lender in the plains to borrow the money. But the villagers look on this as the debt of the whole village, not of the *gaita*, and though the Teli is as unscrupulous here as in any plains village in exacting high interest, yet the combined villagers are usually able to repay in kind in a year or two. Nowadays sometimes not only they, but even their Bastar neighbours, instead of resorting

[1] *Chanda District Gazetteer* (Allahabad, 1909), p. 170.